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Submitting to God: Women and
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AUTHOR(S):

DEWI, Kurniawati H.

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to become their lovers “because he was my comrade [and] we had a cause bigger than ourselves” (p.202). Of course, radical Valentinos like PKP leading cadre Casto Alejandrino took advantage of this attitude with braggadocio, nurturing relationships with four Huk women — including possibly a minor — apart from his wife (Politburo chief Jesus Lava and secretary-general Felicísimo Macapagal had three!!).

But the PKP also added its own unique panache to the issue of love and sexuality. To deal with pervasive “sexual opportunism” the Party “drafted a remarkable document titled ‘The Revolutionary Solution of the Sex Problem’” (p.215), which allowed, among other things, men to keep a “forest wife” to keep them company if “he can convince the leading committee . . . to which he belongs that either his health or his work are being adversely affected by absence from his wife.” Taking a forest wife is also allowed if the cadre inform his “low-land” wife and give her “the freedom to enter into a similar relationship in the barrio or the city, if she, too, finds herself unable to withstand the frustration” (p.217).

There were criticisms against this arrangement, but with the top cadres leading the way in acquiring “forest wives” and not being reprimanded for it, these complaints never gained traction.

These women accepted their fate, with one poignantly absolving Alejandro for he “was really married to the revolution” (p.203). Another woman cadre, Linda Ayala, explained to her critics why she married Jesus Lava this way: “Do not think that I chose him because he was a top leader. That is not true. *I do not love him, but for the sake of the movement, I am willing to be with him.* We will not find anyone who will be as intelligent as him; we cannot replace him anymore. So I am giving myself to him.” She added: “Since we got married, my major assignment was to safeguard him” (p.204, italics mine).

Lanzona is scathing in her critique of this revolutionary machismo and she is definitely into something when she argues that these “extramarital relationships compromised the growth and solidarity of the move-

ment.” This thread — exploring the link between gender bias and revolutionary collapse — is something worth studying in the future.

Except for some minor complaints (I have issues with Lanzona’s use of certain scholars she cites as authorities on the gender relationships inside the revolution), *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion* is a path-breaking work. It is a worthy addition to the already growing literature on the centrality of women in Southeast Asian history and politics.

(Patricio Nuñez Abinales · CSEAS)

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Since the late 1970s, the *dakwah* (reform, revivalist) movement and later the government, tried to elevate the status and practice of Islam in Malaysia. Although commencing from a different departure point, the state Islamisation project and the revivalist embraced a similar platform to produce a non-western modernity of Malaysia. The general picture of Malaysian Islamisation and modernization shows strong male domination, while women are controlled and placed into domestic roles. However, beyond this general picture lie possibilities that Malay women in the Islamisation period experienced individual transformation in the sense that “they produce, recreate, and transform Islamic discourse and practice” (p.5). In this context this book, resulting from a dissertation project during nearly a year of anthropological work involving individual women and religious studies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 1995 to 1996 followed by subsequent research until 2009, shows interesting grounds for presenting intimate portrayals of Malay women’s agency in Malaysia Islamisation.

As indicated by the title, this volume elaborates personal and collective experiences of Malay women embracing Islam in reaching piety, by focusing on three religious activities namely, increasing religious knowledge, performing religious duties, and carving out a religious space. In bringing the intimate experience of Malay women as an agent in Islamisation, the introduction shows an awareness of an analytical shift, from a “subordination” point of view, where women are victimized subjects, to “resistance” where women act as agents. A theoretical feminist platform on women’s agency has enabled scholars to present Muslim women’s active engagement in tradition or religious practice to resist male domination. However, this book wants to go beyond the established feminist notion of agency. It insists that, for the case of Islamisation in Malaysia, “women’s religious commitment and practice have dimensions other than resistance or subordination” (p. 8). The introduction also provides a brief review of works on women’s piety in Muslim and Christian traditions, while clearly emphasizing its unique findings on the meaning of piety and agency in Islamisation in Malaysia.

After the introduction, the book provides a critical background explanation of the interplay between ethnic identity and religious affiliation in shaping modernization and Islamisation in Malaysia. It subsequently presents a very interesting discussion on the tension between *adat* and Islam, and changes the aspect of gender relations where women’s active engagement in scripture and women’s access to education was promoted by early Islamic reform (*kaum muda* movement) since the colonial period, which evolved into postcolonial Islamic reform (*dakwah* movement). It is here where the objective shifts to safeguarding the moral values of Malay women. It carefully examines the complexity of meanings, forms and aspects of the *dakwah* movement, which then leads to the author underlining the similarities in the importance of religious education.

Acquiring religious knowledge is an important point of departure in submitting to God’s will. In this

sense, I am very impressed with the elaboration in Chapter 3 of various kinds of women’s religious classes in attaining religious knowledge in mosques, workplaces, *dakwah* groups and homes, where different issues, debates and tension in joining religious studies, including the intimate experience of the reason and meaning of adopting veiling, are presented in detail. Chapter 4 delivers a slight description of women’s everyday religious practices centering on the five pillars of Islam: the declaration of faith (*shahada*, the Oneness of God), ritual prayer (*sembahyang*), fasting during the Ramadan month, paying the yearly tithe (*zakat*), and pilgrimage. This chapter, however, leaves much room for further elaboration. In discussing the Oneness of God, for instance, it would be more interesting if the author could seek a deeper investigation into women’s personal religious experiences through scripture or practice that connect to *shahada* as the very basic Islamic pillar, before looking into external experiences such as perceptions toward non-Islamic beliefs and practices. Except for the section on praying, in which the book presents interesting stories of challenges faced by Malay women, the elaboration on fasting, *zakat*, and pilgrimage could have been improved through providing more intimate portrayals of Malay women’s acts of piety.

The discussion on women creating religious space, in Chapter 5, leads to an interesting feature: the changing aspect of traditional Malay *adat*, Islam, and forms of women’s religious agency. It shows that middle-class Malay women are able to transform *kenduri*, a rural Malay traditional-syncretism communal ritual where women possess supportive yet peripheral positions over men who are assigned a central element, into a *majlis doa*, where women acquired higher control and authority in performing religious gatherings in their homes. However, after diligently exemplifying the religious scripture and performing the Islamic religious practices, there is still the question “are you *mukmin*?” This critical question is addressed in the next Chapter by presenting the intriguing nuances of women’s efforts in becoming *mukmin* (“God fearing person” p. 162;

“being person with *akal*, a person who could resist *nafsu*” p.173). Surprisingly, in the quest to become *mukmin*, they do not have intentions to disrupt established religious perceptions and practices that men are the religious authority of the family.

The previous point leads into the conclusion of the book, that pious Malay women who flourished within Malaysian Islamisation do not necessarily challenge or resist male authority, as usually understood in feminist discourse. Their desire to submit to God’s will, include taking on traditional gender roles as devout housewives, are more important, rather than the need to resist the patriarchal norm. This book provides an original assessment of Muslim women’s experiences as religious subjects, whose acts and meaning of piety, are contradicted in the conceptualization of agency in feminist theory. Despite the limitations mentioned, this book is rare. It does not only present the more nuanced unique features of Malay women and Islam as an already distinct feature of women in Southeast Asia, but it also postulates a different perspective of agency within feminist thinking.

(Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi · Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University)

Yos Santasombat. *Flexible Peasants: Reconceptualizing the Third World’s Rural Types*. Chiang Mai: Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Chiang Mai University Press, 2008, 287p.

This book is an outcome of the author’s extensive study on the importance of local knowledge and biodiversity in relation to ethnicity and community-based natural resource management. It discusses representations of peasant society in northern Thailand since around 1990. Based on his study of political elites in the 1980s, his experiences in the movement for democratization and for community forests, the author discusses the political strategies among rural and minority people claiming rights vis-a-vis the state. This book is a result of his

long-term studies in Nan and Chiang Mai Provinces in northern Thailand and it demonstrates his framework for understanding peasant society and its changes in Thailand.

Among Thai researchers studying peasant society, political movements among peasants and transformation of peasant identity have been key points in exploring how peasant society has been transformed in the face of modern socio-economic changes in Thai society especially after the 1980s. In Thailand, political peasant movements’ claims to land and livelihood rights became active following the implementation of land-use policies and development projects, and the rise of a popular movement against the government. Thai peasant studies have insisted on the possibility of resistance against the state by peasants, contrasting peasant society with the urban one in discussions on peasant identity formulated against authority as well as on subsistence livelihood.

Particularly in northern Thailand, where there are people referred to as “hill tribes,” political movements claiming land rights and their relationship with ethnic representations are prominent issues in recent studies, as we see in Chapters 2 and 3 of this book. In this movement, Karen, one of the ethnic minority groups, are represented as indigenous forest protectors who live in harmony with nature. There has been much discussion pointing out that this unified representation of Karen, their sustainable agricultural practice and their relation with their traditional culture, runs the risk of undermining their claims for a greater share of natural resources and development assistance. On the one hand, NGOs and academics who have perpetuated this representation regard the strategic effects of such political claims as being more important than recognizing the varied realities of actual Karen communities regarding commercial and agricultural changes, including the fact that many Karen today engage in commercial agriculture and wage labor rather than subsistence rice farming. In contrast, those who are critical of such views claim that this kind of idealized representation potentially contributes to the marginalization of Karen farmers and